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ABSTRACT

Two faculty members from Volunteer State Community College (Tennessee) were assigned the charge to design an institution-wide faculty training and development program for distance learning. The approach to planning began by reexamining the evolution of their use of technology, culminating in online course delivery. This paper explores the following stages through which faculty progress, which can then become the basis for an institution's faculty training and development program: (1) faculty members use or plan to use communication tools such as e-mail, message boards, and chat features to communicate with students outside the classroom; (2) faculty members use or plan to use FrontPage or other World Wide Web-authoring software to develop course materials and enhance student experiences; (3) faculty members have combined or plan to combine the use of communication tools and course Web site materials (combining stages 1 and 2) for course assignments; (4) faculty members have transferred or plan to transfer Web-enhanced course content, classroom materials, and communication initiatives to a course management system; and (5) faculty members are converting or revising a course site or have considered conversion of Web-based course content and classroom materials to an online course. Training and resource development recommendations are included. (MES)

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From Key Handouts to More Hands On Keys:
Planning for the Progressive use of Technology by Faculty

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Two faculty members from Volunteer State Community College were assigned the charge: "design an institution-wide faculty training and development program for distance learning." The approach to planning began by reexamining the evolution of their use of technology, culminating in online course delivery. The presenters explore the stages through which faculty progress, which can then become the basis for an institution's faculty training and development program.

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Background

Faculty members are being asked to integrate more technology-usage into their courses, not only by students, but also, by colleagues and administrators. Within an institution, a wide range of technology skills and/or experiences with Distance Learning courses exists among faculty. When an institution considers use of the WWW, web-authoring and computer-mediated communication tools, planners must recognize that faculty skills and knowledge exist on many levels. Thus, an institutions' planning to provide faculty training and support should address the various technology-usage "entry-levels" of faculty and succeeding "development stages" of existing Distance Learning faculty.

Two faculty members at Volunteer State Community College were assigned the mission: "design an institution-wide faculty training and development program for distance learning." The authors were granted partial course release time in order to complete the task. The faculty members have instructional responsibilities in the Humanities Division (Department of Communication) and the Business Division (Hospitality Services). Both are members of their institution's Distance Learning Committee, a cross-section of academic divisions and administrative offices, such as the Student Services and the Admissions and Records offices. The Distance Learning Committee reviewed the distance learning planning and approach.

Preliminary Planning

The approach to planning began with a re-examination of the evolution of the faculty member's use of technology, culminating in online course delivery. Reflection suggested a pattern, a series of stages faculty progress through in their development of course materials and the use of computer-mediated communication tools in their courses.

Individual faculty members' evolving use of the WWW and computer-mediated communication may be viewed as a series of stages faculty progress through as course materials are developed and communication tools are incorporated into courses.

Five development stages were proposed: communication-emphasis, content-emphasis, integration of course content and communication activities, use of a course-management system, and course conversion to an online or web-based delivery stage. Development of training and resources for faculty must anticipate a variety of skills and prior experiences with the worldwide web, web-authoring software, communication tools, and course design. The five stages of faculty involvement will serve as the focus areas to develop training and resources for faculty development.

Faculty Survey

A variety of course-delivery formats may exist within an institution's distance learning program. At Volunteer State Community College, distance learning includes ITV classrooms and courses that are available on CD-ROM, videotape, and online (as

web-based courses). In addition, many courses are web-enhanced. Each of the college's five divisions offer distance learning sections of courses, with several courses available in a variety of formats.

A component of the initial planning for faculty training and the development of faculty resources for course development started with an online faculty survey. The Distance Learning Survey message and link was e-mailed to full- and part-time faculty, with an additional survey of adjunct faculty planned. Faculty members were asked to respond to a series of questions, organized under Interactive TV, Videotape classes, web-enhanced courses, and online courses.

The survey used a combination of radio buttons, one-line and scrolling text boxes and drop-down menus to organize responses in the survey areas. The question format for ITV, videotape, web-enhanced courses and online courses was essentially the same. Faculty were asked whether they had taught a course using the format, whether they had developed a course for a particular format, whether they had ever taken a course using that format, what training could be provided to encourage course development and what training could be provided to assist the faculty member to improve instruction.

Course Standards

Prior to designing training and resources for faculty, an initiative to establish standards for distance learning courses was begun at the institution. The Distance Learning Committee Chair appointed members to serve on a sub-committee to examine standards and make recommendations to the full committee for review and recommendations for adoption. Sub-committee members were a cross-section of faculty and administrators. Administrators represented Admissions and Records, Student Services and Public Relations while faculty representatives were from Business, Humanities, and Math and Science divisions.

Members of the standards sub-committee reviewed actual and implied standards from a variety of sources. Active distance learning faculty members were requested to make suggestions in a variety of areas, including meetings (actual or online), orientations, course syllabi, calendars and scheduling, assignments, grading and communication.

A student focus group was used to discover student expectations in the same areas as the distance learning faculty members were polled. The institution's distance learning Instruction Evaluation questions were used for this information-gathering aspect.

Finally, requests for copies of existing distance learning standards from the state sister-institutions was made. Reviews of online university websites were made and reviews of pertinent print and electronic resources were conducted.

The sub-committee proposed standards in five areas: syllabi, schedule/calendar, course materials, communication, and the learning community. Proposed standards were further presented as "must" or "should" statements. The "must" statements were proposed as required of all courses while the "should" statements were

proposed as recommended course enhancements.

In addition to recommended standards for review, the sub-committee recommended a course peer review process. Peer reviewers may be members of the faculty members division, or a team of reviewers from a variety of divisions.

Stages for Distance Learning Course Development

Development Stage 1: Faculty members use or plan to use communication tools such as e-mail, message boards and chat features to communicate with students outside the classroom.

Initially, faculty may begin their integration of technology with "resource" sites, communication tools, or course websites with basic course materials, e.g., a welcome or index page, a syllabus and a calendar. The beginning use of computer-mediated or other electronic communication tools and the development of web-based course materials can be concurrent, but interviews suggest, in most cases, an either-or approach, either computer-mediated communication or a website.

At this stage, faculty members use or plan to use communication tools like e-mail, message boards, instant messaging and/or ICQ and chat features to communicate with students outside the classroom.

Faculty may require training and resources for e-mail, discussion, chat, and/or instant messaging. In addition to assisting faculty with software, resources for pedagogical issues should be addressed. Examples are: What are best practices? How will electronic communications improve the actual course? Are there security issues involved? How does opening up email communication alter the learning that typically occurs in the classroom?

Training issues include online etiquette, attachments, use of "emoticons," and threaded discussions, to name a few.

During this stage, faculty members are also beginning to think about ways to expand the horizons outside the classroom. This thinking may often start before the communication function is fully explored - placing the syllabus and handouts online for student access are two common thoughts of faculty.

Stage 1 is a "communication-emphasis" development stage. Faculty members are engaged in the development of communication approaches that reach beyond the four walls of the traditional classroom

Development Stage 2: Faculty members use or plan to use FrontPage or other) web-authoring software to develop course materials and enhance student experiences.

As noted above, even before the content-emphasis development stage has begun, faculty often start thinking about how they can use the Web to enhance their courses, including links to websites, having students do research assignments online and starting to become comfortable with the technology and terminology.

Oftentimes, faculty will begin to learn a little bit about HTML before they even venture near web-authoring software.

Technical concerns faculty are interested in at this stage include: ADA Requirements, Bandwidth Issues, and appropriate software for multi-media enhancements.

Pedagogical Issues include copyright and creation of content that goes beyond simply placing lecture notes or lecture outlines online.

Training and resources faculty will require assistance with include: text formatting, graphics, page design, use of colors and FTP.

Although the entry-level for faculty may be a communication-oriented or a content-oriented approach, content development can follow communication. Institutions will often already have an e-mail system for student and faculty communication in place.

Stage 2 is a "content-emphasis" development stage. Faculty members are beginning to explore web-authoring software and are thinking about what course materials to make available online.

Development Stage 3: Faculty members have combined or plan to combine the use of communication tools and course website materials (combining "Development Stages" 1 & 2) for course assignments

Faculty may still be using communication tools that are separate from the course website at this stage. For example, faculty may be using an institution e-mail address, a home address, or a third address such as Hotmail or Yahoo, with a course website and course materials on the institution server.

As technology-use expands or broadens, communication tools and course materials are usually integrated, and that integration can lead to a more "connected," collaborative student learning. Faculty may combine faxed or e-mailed communication assignments with assignment directions and/or resources posted on a course website. At "Development Stage 3," faculty members have progressed to the use of both communication tools and web-based course materials for one or more individual courses or sections of a course.

A significant pedagogical issue at this stage includes developing a plan for building community online.

Training needs include additional instruction in using web-authoring software, facilitating student interaction in the online environment and assisting students with basic technical help issues.

Stage 3 is an "integrated content/communication" development stage. As faculty members place course materials online and use electronic means to communicate with students, an integration of the two begins to develop. Concerns of faculty members may focus on student interaction with course materials and communication of student responses between instructor and student.

Development Stage 4: Faculty members have transferred or plan to transfer web-enhanced course content, classroom materials and communication initiatives to a course management system.

An increasing integration of the use of a separate communication tool (like Microsoft's Outlook mail program) and a separate website for course materials invites faculty to desire a more integrated approach. A course management system will offer faculty the opportunity to combine course materials and communication tools at one location. Integrating the communication and course materials at one site, combined with the additional features offered by a course management system like WebCT (a calendar, grade book and testing, for example) allows for the more expedient use of student and instructor time.

Training needs include using the course management system features and integrating outside sources such as email into the existing course management system.

Stage 4 is an enhanced "course management-oriented" development stage. Up to this stage, faculty members may have been using a "separated" approach. For example, course materials exist on a website, but a separate e-mail program, like MS Outlook may be used for communication, or course assignments are faxed. Faculty members can enhance their courses by using a course management system, combining many class activities at a single site. Examples of course management systems are WebCT and BlackBoard.

Development Stage 5: Faculty members are converting or revising a course site or have considered conversion of web-based course content and classroom materials to an online course.

At "Development Stage 5," faculty members are ready to consider a course conversion to an online or web-based course environment. The WebCT e-mail discussion board, chat feature, calendar, testing and grade book offer additional opportunities for student-to-student collaboration and instructor/student communication.

Technical Issues include: designing multimedia content, available technology and bandwidth.

Training needs include advanced instruction in web-authoring tools such as Flash, encouraging collaboration and communication between students, and advanced facilitation skills for faculty.

Stage 5 may be identified as an "online conversion" development stage. Faculty members have been using a course management system and are preparing for conversion of the course to an online or web-based environment.

Training and Resource Development Recommendations

Dedicated print resources on reserve for distance learning faculty
Distance Learning website pages with electronic resources for faculty at each development stage
Faculty In-service meetings, workshops, and individualized training in the Faculty Development Center
Course and Communication development checklists and standards for faculty
Various course templates, including a syllabus, office schedule, and homepage
Course Management System "practice courses" for faculty engaged in course development
Peer Review Teams for course evaluation and coaching